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DATE: May 3, 2013
TO: Michigan Legislators
SUBJECT: Support for Grant's Bill, SB 354

I am the Director for the Kalamazoo County Animal Services and Enforcement Department, and I respectfully ask that you lend your support to SB 354, known as "Grant's Bill" to require humane euthanasia in all Michigan animal shelters.

I was an Animal Control Officer with Kalamazoo County prior to becoming the Director in 2003. Prior to my appointment as Director, Kalamazoo policy was to routinely euthanize animals using CO2 gas chambers for the majority of the animals that required euthanasia. I watched and assisted in what I felt was not only an inhumane practice but an unethical practice as well. I cringed as I listened to the animals in the chamber thrash around as the gas caused a burning sensation in the animal's throat, and suffocated the innocent victim slowly. The struggle to breath in the absence of oxygen placed each animal in a stressful and horrifying last few seconds of their lives. On many more than one occasion, I observed animals who had been taken out of the chamber, assumed to be dead due to the lack of a heartbeat, and placed in a barrel in the cooler to be held for disposal, awaken and chew their way through other bodies to get out of that barrel. I have talked to other Animal Control Officers from other counties here in Michigan and in other states where gas chambers are used, tell of similar stories. This happens all the time and in every agency that uses gas as a euthanasia tool. For agencies that incinerate their dead animals, I wonder how many were actually alive when they were incinerated, only to face another horror before death.

I know the feeling these animals have if only for a brief instant. While taking a carrier out of the chamber with an animal in it, I accidentally leaned too far into the chamber and immediately felt my throat on fire and the air taken out of my lungs. I became the Director to make sure no other animal in our county would ever suffer such a fate again. Immediately after becoming the Director I shut down and removed the gas chambers from our facility. Staff that had been using the chambers for years were afraid that euthanizing aggressive dogs and wildlife with an injectable euthanasia drug would put their safety at risk. I assured them that other agencies across the country already do this and we would get the training to do it too. It has been almost 9 years since we got rid of those chambers, and we have never had an incident or injury to a staff member or anyone else from the change.

I know firsthand, the reluctance of employees that have always used gas for euthanasia, to change to a method that may (and should) take a little longer to perform. In at least one if not more of the four counties in Michigan still using the gas chambers, the county is utilizing inmates to euthanize the animals in the chambers. Whether this is supposed to be a cost savings or a way to protect the